

Design and Validation of a Psychological Empowerment Program for University Students from Divorced Families

Maryam. Behbahani¹, Shohreh. Ghorban Shiroudi^{1*}, Javad. Khalatbari²

¹ Department of Family and Counseling, NT.C., Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

² Department of Psychology, To.C., Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon, Iran

* Corresponding author email address: Shohrehghsh@iau.ac.ir

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to design and validate a psychological empowerment program grounded in the lived experiences and specific psychosocial needs of university students from divorced families.

Methods and Materials: The study employed a qualitative developmental design. Participants included 15 dentistry students from divorced families, aged 19–28 years, who were selected through purposive sampling, with recruitment continuing until thematic saturation was reached. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews addressing the psychological, emotional, relational, social, educational, and economic consequences of parental divorce. The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis based on Attride-Stirling's thematic-network approach with the assistance of MAXQDA software. The extracted themes were integrated with relevant psychological theories and intervention models to develop a ten-session psychological empowerment program. Content validation was subsequently conducted by 12 experts in clinical psychology, counseling, health psychology, and family studies. Expert judgments concerning necessity, relevance, clarity, simplicity, sequencing, and feasibility were examined using the Content Validity Ratio and Content Validity Index.

Findings: The analysis generated 397 initial codes, which were consolidated into 79 basic themes, 15 organizing themes, and five global themes: the lived experience of difficulties associated with parental divorce, psychological resilience, strengthening communication skills, personal and cognitive development, and development of social support. These themes informed ten intervention sessions focused on acceptance, resilience, cognitive reconstruction, communication, coping, self-compassion, future planning, support-network development, integration, and maintenance. In the initial validation, the overall Content Validity Ratio was 0.72 and the Content Validity Index was 0.89. Following expert-recommended revisions, all sessions exceeded the required validity threshold, while the overall indices increased to 0.73 and 0.91, respectively.

Conclusion: The developed program demonstrated adequate conceptual coherence and content validity and provides a multidimensional, context-sensitive framework for strengthening psychological empowerment among university students from divorced families.

Keywords: Parental divorce, psychological empowerment, university students, thematic analysis, psychological resilience, content validation

1. Introduction

Parental divorce is one of the most consequential changes that can occur within the family system because it alters not only the legal and residential relationship between parents but also the emotional, relational, economic, and developmental environment in which children grow. Although divorce may reduce exposure to an intensely conflictual marital relationship in some families, it frequently introduces a series of new demands, including separation from one parent, changes in residence, reduced economic resources, disruption of daily routines, reorganization of parental roles, and uncertainty regarding the continuity of family relationships. The psychological meaning of divorce for children therefore cannot be understood solely through the formal dissolution of the marital bond. Rather, it should be considered a multidimensional process in which family conflict, loss, ambiguity, changed attachment relationships, social stigma, economic pressure, and the child's interpretation of the event interact over time. Research comparing children from divorced and intact families has shown that the emotional quality of family relationships, particularly emotional intimacy and perceived availability of caregivers, is closely associated with children's adjustment after divorce (Guttmann & Rosenberg, 2003).

The effects of parental divorce may persist beyond childhood and adolescence and remain evident during emerging adulthood. University students who have experienced parental divorce may appear developmentally independent, yet the emotional and relational consequences of family dissolution can continue to influence their identity, interpersonal expectations, self-worth, academic functioning, and views of intimate relationships. Entering university itself requires adjustment to new academic responsibilities, social networks, financial pressures, and increasing autonomy. When these developmental demands are combined with unresolved experiences related to parental divorce, students may face a more complex process of adaptation. Qualitative investigations of adults whose parents divorced have identified enduring concerns related to emotional insecurity, mistrust, fear of relationship instability, unresolved anger, loneliness, self-blame, and difficulty integrating the divorce into a coherent personal narrative (Khandandel et al., 2023). These findings suggest that the consequences of parental divorce may be developmentally transformed rather than simply disappearing with age.

The psychological outcomes of parental divorce are not uniform, and children and young adults may differ considerably in their responses. Some individuals demonstrate substantial distress, whereas others gradually adapt or even develop new personal capacities through the process of coping with adversity. The variability in outcomes is influenced by factors such as the intensity and duration of parental conflict, the quality of post-divorce parenting, continued contact with both parents, economic stability, social support, the individual's developmental stage, and the meaning attributed to the divorce. Children who perceive the divorce as evidence of rejection, personal inadequacy, or permanent relational insecurity may be more vulnerable to long-term difficulties than those who receive age-appropriate explanations, emotional support, and opportunities to express their feelings. The quality-of-life evaluations of children of divorce have similarly indicated that psychological processes can moderate the relationship between family disruption and later adjustment, demonstrating that subjective interpretations and coping mechanisms are central to post-divorce well-being (Sorek, 2019).

A considerable body of research has documented elevated psychological vulnerability among children of divorced parents. Compared with peers from intact families, they may report higher levels of anxiety, depressive symptoms, aggression, interpersonal sensitivity, emotional dysregulation, behavioral problems, and diminished psychological security. Comparative evidence has shown meaningful differences in psychological disorders between children of divorce and their peers, emphasizing the need to treat this population as potentially vulnerable without assuming that all individuals will experience identical outcomes (Moradi & Akhiani, 2020). Internalizing problems may include sadness, fear, guilt, withdrawal, loneliness, and hopelessness, whereas externalizing problems may involve anger, impulsive behavior, defiance, and interpersonal conflict. These difficulties may become mutually reinforcing; for example, emotional distress can reduce concentration and academic engagement, while academic problems may further weaken self-confidence and increase hopelessness.

The relational consequences of divorce are equally important. Children may be exposed to continuing parental conflict, loyalty conflicts, negative statements about the other parent, inconsistent parenting, or pressure to align with one side of the family. In severe situations, exposure to parental alienation processes can create enduring emotional

consequences, including distorted perceptions of a parent, guilt, grief, identity conflict, and difficulty trusting close relationships. A systematic review of the long-term emotional consequences of parental alienation exposure among children of divorced parents highlighted the possibility that these experiences may continue to affect emotional functioning and relationships later in life (Miralles et al., 2023). Even when explicit alienation is absent, repeated exposure to unresolved parental conflict can teach children that intimacy is unstable, conflict is dangerous, and close relationships are likely to end in abandonment or betrayal.

The possibility of a parent's remarriage can introduce another layer of psychological complexity. The formation of a stepfamily may reactivate concerns regarding loyalty, belonging, replacement, and emotional security. Children may worry that the remarried parent will become less available or that accepting a stepparent represents disloyalty toward the other biological parent. The lived experiences of children during the process of their mothers' potential remarriage demonstrate that cultural expectations, family boundaries, emotional attachment, and uncertainty about new roles can shape children's reactions to post-divorce family reconstruction (Hatami Varzaneh & Imani, 2025). These experiences are relevant to university students because the reorganization of the family may continue during their late adolescence or emerging adulthood, a period when they are simultaneously attempting to establish autonomy and maintain meaningful connections with family members.

Economic changes following divorce can also have profound psychological and educational implications. Reduced family income, inconsistent financial support, relocation, and increased parental employment demands may limit access to educational resources, recreation, transportation, suitable housing, and social participation. University students from divorced families may need to work while studying, assume responsibilities for younger siblings, or contribute financially to the household. Such pressures can increase stress, restrict participation in university life, and intensify social comparison with peers. Financial strain also affects emotional relationships because conflict over expenses, parental support, and perceived unfairness may deepen feelings of abandonment or resentment. Therefore, psychological empowerment programs for this group should address not only emotional regulation but also practical capacities such as problem-

solving, help-seeking, time management, resource identification, and basic financial planning.

Despite these vulnerabilities, research has also identified protective psychological characteristics among children of divorce. Hope is one such resource because it enables individuals to maintain future orientation, identify pathways toward goals, and preserve motivation despite family adversity. Research on hope among students from single-parent and divorced families has shown that the way young people conceptualize their future and interpret their family situation is closely connected with their capacity to continue striving toward valued goals (Eslami et al., 2017). Hope is not merely positive expectation; it includes perceived agency, the ability to generate alternative routes when obstacles arise, and the belief that life can remain meaningful despite previous loss. These qualities are particularly important for university students, whose educational and occupational development depends on sustained goal-directed effort.

Resilience and self-concept are also central to adaptation after parental divorce. Resilience refers to a dynamic process through which individuals maintain or recover functioning when confronted with adversity. It includes emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility, self-efficacy, access to support, realistic appraisal of problems, and the ability to construct adaptive meaning. An intervention program developed for children of divorce was found to improve self-concept and increase resilience, indicating that these capacities can be strengthened through structured psychological education rather than being regarded as fixed personal traits (Hosseini Yazdi et al., 2015). A positive self-concept may protect children and young adults against internalizing parental conflict as evidence of their own worthlessness. When individuals can distinguish their identity from their parents' marital relationship, they become more capable of developing independent goals, relationships, and values.

Self-esteem and functional flexibility similarly contribute to psychological empowerment. Children of divorce may experience shame, social labeling, and negative comparisons, all of which can weaken their sense of personal value. Compassion-focused approaches can be particularly relevant because they address harsh self-criticism, shame, perceived defectiveness, and the tendency to respond to emotional pain through avoidance or self-punishment. Compassion-focused therapy has been reported to enhance self-esteem and functional flexibility among children of divorce, suggesting that compassionate self-relating can

support both emotional recovery and adaptive behavior (Gorjinpor et al., 2020). For university students, self-compassion may help reduce self-blame for the divorce, normalize painful emotions, and create a more balanced response to academic failure, interpersonal rejection, and uncertainty.

Emotional expression is another major area of need. Some children of divorce suppress sadness and anger because they fear burdening a distressed parent, worsening family conflict, or appearing disloyal. Others express accumulated distress through aggression, withdrawal, or impulsive reactions. Both emotional inhibition and uncontrolled emotional discharge can interfere with relationships and psychological adjustment. Integrated psychoeducational treatment has shown effectiveness in addressing anhedonia and emotional expressiveness among children of divorced parents, indicating that emotional awareness and healthy expression can be taught systematically (Soleimani et al., 2022). Similarly, research comparing cognitive-behavioral and unified transdiagnostic treatments has demonstrated that structured interventions may improve emotional expression and reduce fear of intimacy in children of divorce (Soleymani et al., 2020). These findings are highly relevant to emerging adults, for whom the capacity to understand and communicate emotions is essential to establishing stable friendships and intimate relationships.

Fear of intimacy may develop when the parental relationship becomes a model of conflict, betrayal, unpredictability, or abandonment. University students with this background may desire close relationships while simultaneously fearing dependency, rejection, or repetition of their parents' marital patterns. They may avoid vulnerability, maintain excessive emotional distance, or become overly dependent on partners for reassurance. Because emotional intimacy is strongly associated with adjustment in families affected by divorce, interventions should address active listening, assertiveness, boundary setting, trust, emotional independence, and constructive conflict resolution (Guttmann & Rosenberg, 2003). Strengthening these competencies can help participants differentiate the relational patterns they observed in their family of origin from the relationships they are capable of creating in adulthood.

Positive psychology interventions offer another useful framework by emphasizing strengths, meaning, hope, gratitude, optimism, and personal resources rather than focusing exclusively on symptoms. A positive psychology-

based intervention has been shown to reduce internalized problems among children of divorce, supporting the value of approaches that combine the reduction of distress with the cultivation of adaptive capacities (Vahedi et al., 2021). This orientation is compatible with psychological empowerment because empowerment involves increasing perceived competence, agency, choice, and the ability to influence one's life. For university students from divorced families, a strengths-based approach may help shift attention from a stigmatized identity as a "child of divorce" toward a broader and more differentiated understanding of personal abilities, values, achievements, and future possibilities.

Acceptance-based interventions may also facilitate adjustment by helping individuals reduce experiential avoidance and establish a more flexible relationship with painful thoughts and emotions. Acceptance does not mean approving harmful parental behavior or denying loss. Rather, it involves acknowledging realities that cannot be changed while directing personal effort toward valued and controllable areas of life. Acceptance and commitment group therapy has been reported to improve psychological well-being and happiness among children of divorce (Zolghadri et al., 2024). Such findings suggest that acceptance, values clarification, mindful awareness, and committed action may be valuable components of an empowerment package, especially for students who remain preoccupied with changing the past or resolving parental conflicts beyond their control.

Specialized intervention programs for children of divorce have also produced promising outcomes. The Children of Divorce Intervention Program has been used to address internalizing and externalizing difficulties by providing psychoeducation, emotional support, coping-skills training, correction of misconceptions, and opportunities for shared discussion. Evidence has indicated that this program can reduce internalized and externalized problems among children affected by divorce (Hoseini Yazdi et al., 2015). Subsequent reporting has likewise supported the effectiveness of the Children of Divorce Intervention Program for reducing these behavioral and emotional difficulties (Hoseini Yazdi et al., 2021). These studies demonstrate the usefulness of structured, population-specific intervention rather than relying exclusively on general counseling approaches.

Intervention can also modify how children interpret parental divorce. Misconceptions such as "the divorce happened because of me," "one parent left because I was not lovable," or "all close relationships eventually fail" may

sustain distress long after the family transition. A single-case investigation of an intervention program for children of divorce showed improvements in children's perceptions of parental divorce, underscoring the importance of cognitive understanding and meaning reconstruction (Ramazanzadeh et al., 2023). Correcting inaccurate interpretations may reduce guilt, anger, helplessness, and catastrophic expectations. In university students, cognitive reconstruction should extend to beliefs regarding identity, achievement, trust, intimacy, and the possibility of forming healthy future families.

Family-focused interventions are also relevant because children's adjustment is affected by parental behavior before and after divorce. A training protocol designed to improve mothers' interactions with children of divorce demonstrated that changing parental responses can contribute to better outcomes for children (Gholami et al., 2019). However, university students may no longer have consistent access to parent-based intervention, and one or both parents may be unwilling to participate. Consequently, there is a need for programs that empower the students themselves by strengthening emotional, cognitive, interpersonal, and practical capacities while still recognizing the influence of family relationships.

The reviewed evidence demonstrates that interventions based on resilience, compassion, positive psychology, acceptance and commitment, psychoeducation, cognitive-behavioral methods, transdiagnostic emotion regulation, and specialized divorce-adjustment programs can improve important outcomes among children of divorce. Nevertheless, several limitations remain in the available intervention literature. Many programs have been developed for children or younger adolescents, whereas fewer interventions have been specifically designed around the developmental and contextual needs of university students. Emerging adults face distinct concerns, including academic performance, career planning, financial independence, intimate relationships, identity formation, residential transitions, and the need to establish psychological autonomy from parents. An intervention package developed for younger children may not adequately address these concerns.

A further limitation is that many intervention packages are primarily theory-driven or adapted from general protocols without first conducting an in-depth needs assessment within the target population. Although established theories provide scientific coherence, interventions may be less contextually relevant when they do

not reflect the participants' language, priorities, cultural experiences, and actual challenges. The qualitative findings reported in adulthood indicate that the effects of parental divorce can be complex and personally interpreted, supporting the need for interventions grounded in lived experience (Khandandel et al., 2023). Similarly, culturally situated accounts of post-divorce family restructuring show that children's experiences are influenced by family norms, cultural expectations, and the meanings attached to divorce and remarriage (Hatami Varzaneh & Imani, 2025). Therefore, program development should integrate empirical accounts of participants' needs with established psychological frameworks.

Psychological empowerment provides an appropriate integrative framework for such a program. Within this perspective, empowerment includes developing emotional awareness, perceived competence, personal agency, decision-making capacity, adaptive coping, interpersonal effectiveness, self-compassion, goal orientation, access to support, and the ability to mobilize available resources. For university students from divorced families, empowerment does not imply eliminating the historical effects of divorce. It refers to increasing their capacity to interpret the experience realistically, regulate emotional responses, reduce self-blame, maintain healthy boundaries, form supportive relationships, solve practical problems, identify personal strengths, and pursue meaningful goals.

The need for a multidimensional program is also supported by the diversity of intervention outcomes reported in previous research. Some studies have targeted internalizing and externalizing symptoms (Hoseini Yazdi et al., 2015; Hoseini Yazdi et al., 2021), while others have focused on self-concept and resilience (Hosseini Yazdi et al., 2015), self-esteem and flexibility (Gorjinpor et al., 2020), hope (Eslami et al., 2017), emotional expression and intimacy (Soleimani et al., 2022; Soleymani et al., 2020), psychological well-being and happiness (Zolghadri et al., 2024), positive psychological functioning (Vahedi et al., 2021), perceptions of divorce (Ramazanzadeh et al., 2023), and quality of life (Sorek, 2019). Considered together, these outcomes indicate that no single skill or symptom domain is sufficient to represent the empowerment needs of this population.

Accordingly, a comprehensive intervention for university students from divorced families should combine recognition of the psychological and social consequences of divorce with the development of resilience, emotional regulation, adaptive cognition, self-compassion, interpersonal skills,

self-knowledge, goal setting, practical life management, and social support. It should also undergo systematic content validation to ensure that its objectives, activities, sequence, language, and implementation procedures are necessary, clear, theoretically coherent, and appropriate for the target population. Expert validation is particularly important when a package integrates several theoretical traditions and seeks to translate qualitative findings into structured educational and psychological sessions.

Therefore, the present study aimed to design and validate a psychological empowerment program grounded in the lived experiences and identified needs of university students from divorced families.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study employed a qualitative developmental design to develop and validate a psychological empowerment program for university students from divorced families. The research process focused on identifying the lived experiences, psychological challenges, support needs, and empowerment capacities of university students whose parents had divorced and subsequently transforming the findings into a structured psychological intervention program. Unlike mixed-method studies, the present investigation did not include a separate quantitative phase or an experimental assessment of intervention effectiveness. Rather, the entire study was conducted within a qualitative framework consisting of an exploratory needs-assessment process, program development, and qualitative content validation through expert review. The research was carried out in several interconnected stages. First, the lived experiences and psychological needs of university students from divorced families were explored through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Second, the interview findings were integrated with relevant psychological theories, established intervention models, and previous research concerning parental divorce, psychological empowerment, emotional adjustment, interpersonal relationships, resilience, and coping. Third, the initial version of the psychological empowerment program was developed by converting the extracted themes into session objectives, educational content, therapeutic techniques, experiential exercises, and between-session assignments. Finally, the proposed program was reviewed by a panel of experts, and its content was revised according to their qualitative judgments and recommendations.

The primary participants consisted of 15 university students whose parents had divorced. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling because the study required individuals who had direct experience of parental divorce and were able to provide detailed accounts of its psychological, emotional, relational, and educational consequences. Sampling continued until theoretical and thematic saturation was achieved. Saturation was considered to have occurred when additional interviews no longer generated substantially new codes, meanings, or themes and the emerging thematic structure adequately represented the principal experiences and empowerment needs expressed by the participants. Eligibility criteria included being enrolled as a university student at the time of the study, having experienced the legal or permanent separation of one's parents, possessing the ability and willingness to describe personal experiences, and providing informed consent to participate. Students who were experiencing an acute psychological crisis that could interfere with the interview process, were unable to participate meaningfully in the interview, or withdrew their consent were not included in the final sample.

The content-validation panel consisted of 12 university faculty members and professional psychologists with relevant expertise in counseling psychology, clinical psychology, family psychology, psychotherapy, psychological intervention design, or qualitative research. Experts were selected purposively on the basis of their academic qualifications, professional experience, familiarity with the psychological consequences of divorce, and competence in evaluating intervention programs. They examined the preliminary program in terms of conceptual relevance, comprehensiveness, clarity, theoretical coherence, sensitivity to the lived experiences of university students from divorced families, logical sequencing of sessions, appropriateness of techniques and exercises, and feasibility of implementation in university counseling settings. Expert feedback was used to identify ambiguous, repetitive, theoretically inconsistent, culturally inappropriate, or practically difficult components. Revisions were made through an iterative process until the structure and content of the program were judged to be sufficiently coherent, comprehensive, and applicable.

Ethical principles were observed throughout the research process. Before each interview, the purpose and procedures of the study were explained to participants, and informed consent was obtained. Participants were informed that their involvement was voluntary, that they could decline to

answer any question, and that they could withdraw from the study without penalty. To protect confidentiality, identifying information was removed from interview transcripts, and participants were represented through codes rather than names. Because the interviews addressed potentially sensitive experiences related to parental conflict, separation, rejection, emotional distress, and family relationships, the interviews were conducted in a supportive and nonjudgmental manner. Participants were also informed that they could pause or terminate the interview if they experienced discomfort.

2.2. Measures

Data were collected primarily through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. A semi-structured format was selected because it provided sufficient consistency across interviews while allowing participants to describe their experiences freely and elaborate on issues that were personally meaningful. The interview guide was developed through a preliminary review of the literature on parental divorce, emerging adulthood, university adjustment, psychological empowerment, emotional regulation, self-concept, interpersonal trust, resilience, perceived control, social support, and meaning-making. The questions were open-ended and designed to facilitate detailed descriptions rather than predetermined or restricted responses. The interviews explored participants' lived experiences of parental divorce, their emotional responses to the separation, changes in their relationships with parents and other family members, perceived experiences of rejection or abandonment, concerns regarding intimacy and future relationships, changes in self-esteem and self-concept, difficulties in regulating emotions, responses to psychological pressure, coping strategies, sources of social support, academic and interpersonal challenges, and areas in which they believed psychological empowerment was needed.

The interview process began with broad questions intended to establish rapport and allow participants to narrate their experiences in their own words. More focused probing questions were then used to clarify meanings, explore contradictions, obtain concrete examples, and understand the personal and contextual significance of the reported experiences. Typical prompts addressed how parental divorce had affected participants' perceptions of themselves, their ability to trust others, their management of difficult emotions, their sense of control over life events, and their expectations regarding close relationships. Participants were

also invited to describe the psychological skills, forms of support, and educational or therapeutic content that they believed would be beneficial to university students with similar experiences. The flexible interview format enabled the researcher to pursue emerging issues that had not been anticipated during the initial development of the interview guide.

Interviews were conducted individually in a private and appropriate setting and continued until sufficient depth had been achieved. With participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate documentation. Field notes were also prepared during and immediately after each interview to record contextual information, significant emotional reactions, nonverbal observations, emerging analytical ideas, and issues requiring further exploration in subsequent interviews. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were reviewed against the original recordings to improve accuracy. Data collection and preliminary analysis proceeded concurrently, allowing insights from earlier interviews to inform probing questions in later interviews and supporting the assessment of thematic saturation.

In addition to the interviews, a structured expert-review form was used during the program-validation stage. The form provided experts with the proposed title, rationale, overarching objectives, session-specific goals, theoretical foundations, instructional content, therapeutic techniques, exercises, homework assignments, implementation procedures, and expected outcomes of the program. Experts were asked to provide written comments regarding the necessity and appropriateness of each component, the correspondence between identified needs and proposed intervention content, the clarity of instructions, the developmental suitability of the material for university students, the logical order of the sessions, the cultural and contextual appropriateness of the content, and the practical feasibility of delivering the program. Space was provided for experts to recommend the removal, addition, integration, reformulation, or reordering of program components. The review process was therefore interpretive and qualitative rather than based on statistical content-validity coefficients.

The psychological empowerment program was developed through an integrative procedure. Initially, the needs identified in participants' accounts were mapped onto conceptually related psychological constructs. Experiences such as emotional turmoil, persistent sadness, anger, shame, insecurity, fear of abandonment, dysfunctional beliefs about the self and relationships, difficulty establishing intimacy,

reduced trust, perceived rejection, diminished control, and uncertainty in interpreting the meaning of parental divorce were compared with relevant theoretical frameworks. Psychological principles and intervention techniques were then selected according to their capacity to address the identified needs. These techniques were organized into a coherent sequence of sessions and translated into educational explanations, reflective activities, experiential practices, interpersonal exercises, and home assignments. The program was designed to remain grounded in participants' lived experiences while also maintaining theoretical consistency and practical applicability.

2.3. Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Analysis began with repeated reading of the verbatim transcripts to achieve immersion in the data and develop a comprehensive understanding of participants' narratives. During this stage, initial observations, recurring ideas, emotional patterns, contextual meanings, and potentially significant statements were recorded. The transcripts were then examined line by line, and meaningful units related to the psychological consequences of parental divorce, coping processes, unmet needs, personal resources, relational difficulties, and empowerment requirements were identified. Initial codes were generated as closely as possible to participants' descriptions to preserve the experiential meaning of the data and reduce the risk of imposing predetermined theoretical categories.

Following initial coding, conceptually similar codes were compared, grouped, and organized into basic themes. Attention was paid to both convergent and divergent experiences so that the analysis would not obscure important differences among participants. Basic themes were subsequently examined in relation to one another and combined into broader organizing themes representing major domains of psychological experience and empowerment. Through continued comparison, refinement, and abstraction, overarching themes were developed to explain the principal dimensions that should be addressed by the psychological empowerment program. Themes were reviewed against the coded extracts and the complete dataset to determine whether they were internally coherent, conceptually distinct, and adequately supported by participants' accounts. Themes that overlapped substantially were merged, whereas themes that were overly broad were divided into more specific categories. The final themes were

clearly defined and named, and their relationships with the objectives and components of the intervention program were documented.

The development of the program involved translating the final thematic structure into intervention content. Each overarching and organizing theme was examined to determine the psychological knowledge, skills, and experiences required to address it. The identified needs were then connected to relevant theoretical concepts and evidence-informed psychological techniques. The resulting components were arranged according to a developmental and therapeutic logic, beginning with the establishment of psychological safety and awareness of the effects of parental divorce and progressing toward emotional understanding, cognitive reconstruction, self-acceptance, interpersonal empowerment, perceived control, resilience, adaptive coping, and meaning-making. The objectives, content, activities, exercises, and assignments of each session were reviewed to ensure that they directly corresponded to the themes derived from participants' narratives.

Data obtained from the expert-review stage were analyzed through qualitative content analysis. Experts' written comments were read repeatedly, categorized according to the component of the program to which they referred, and compared across reviewers. Feedback was organized into categories such as conceptual relevance, theoretical consistency, clarity of content, comprehensiveness, sequencing, cultural appropriateness, feasibility, and suggested modification. Recommendations shared by several experts or supported by a strong theoretical rationale were given particular consideration. Each proposed change was examined in relation to the original qualitative findings to ensure that revisions did not distance the program from participants' lived experiences. Components that were unclear, repetitive, insufficiently related to the extracted themes, or difficult to implement were revised, integrated, relocated, or removed. New content was added when experts identified a meaningful need that was consistent with the interview findings and the theoretical foundations of the program. The final version was produced after successive revisions had established an acceptable level of qualitative agreement regarding the coherence, relevance, comprehensiveness, and practical applicability of the package.

Several strategies were used to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings. Credibility was supported through prolonged engagement with the interview data, concurrent data collection and analysis, purposive

recruitment of information-rich participants, and the continuation of interviews until thematic saturation. Member reflection was used where appropriate by discussing summaries or interpretations with selected participants to determine whether the findings corresponded with their experiences. Peer and expert review contributed to the evaluation of the coding structure, thematic interpretations, and program components. Dependability was strengthened by maintaining an audit trail that documented interview procedures, coding decisions, theme development, theoretical integration, expert feedback, and revisions to the program. Confirmability was promoted through reflexive note-taking and systematic grounding of interpretations in participants' statements. Transferability was facilitated by providing detailed descriptions of the participants, research context, sampling process, data collection procedures, and analytical stages, enabling readers to judge the applicability of the findings to other university populations affected by parental divorce.

3. Findings and Results

The data obtained from the semi-structured interviews were examined through thematic analysis. This analytical approach made it possible to move beyond isolated personal statements and identify recurring patterns, shared meanings, central concepts, and broader structures underlying the participants' experiences. Accordingly, individual accounts were progressively transformed from concrete descriptions into a more abstract and integrated network of themes representing the psychological empowerment needs of university students from divorced families.

The analysis was conducted using MAXQDA and was informed by Attride-Stirling's thematic-network approach. The analytical logic involved a progressive movement from specific units of meaning toward increasingly abstract conceptual categories. The process began with the extraction of initial codes from the interview transcripts. Semantically related codes were subsequently grouped into basic themes, basic themes were integrated into organizing themes, and organizing themes were ultimately synthesized into global themes. The resulting thematic network provided the empirical foundation for designing the psychological empowerment program.

The qualitative analysis was gradual, interpretive, and systematic. Rather than limiting the analysis to the explicit surface content of participants' statements, attention was

directed toward underlying meanings, conceptual connections, repeated experiential patterns, and the psychological significance of the participants' narratives. The researcher first read each transcript repeatedly to become deeply familiar with the data. During this familiarization process, attention was paid to participants' vocabulary, emotional expressions, emphases, repetitions, contradictions, and the broader context in which each experience was narrated.

Following familiarization, statements and passages relevant to the research purpose were identified and coded. Each meaning unit reflecting an emotion, experience, attitude, difficulty, behavioral reaction, coping response, psychological resource, or process of psychosocial reconstruction was recorded as an initial code. Expressions such as "I was under a lot of stress," "no one understood how I felt," "living in two homes confused me," and "talking to a counselor helped me feel better" were initially treated as separate units of meaning. A total of 397 initial codes were extracted, indicating considerable richness and diversity in the participants' lived experiences.

The initial codes were then reviewed, compared, and refined. Repetitive codes and codes with close conceptual meanings were merged, while codes representing meaningfully different experiences were retained separately. For example, statements concerning persistent tension, inability to think clearly under pressure, and stress related to parental divorce were combined within a common conceptual cluster. Through this process, the analytical volume of the data was reduced without eliminating meaningful experiential differences.

The comparison and integration of the 397 initial codes resulted in 79 basic themes. These basic themes constituted the first structured level of analysis and remained relatively close to the participants' original narratives. The basic themes were subsequently classified into 15 organizing themes, which represented broader domains of experience and psychological need. Finally, the organizing themes were integrated into five global themes: the lived experience of difficulties associated with parental divorce, psychological resilience, strengthening communication skills, personal and cognitive development, and development of social support.

The participants were 15 university students between 19 and 28 years of age. All participants were dentistry students, and the sample included nine women and six men. Their demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1*Demographic Characteristics of the Interview Participants*

Participant	Age	Field of study	Gender
Participant 1	19	Dentistry	Female
Participant 2	22	Dentistry	Male
Participant 3	21	Dentistry	Male
Participant 4	23	Dentistry	Female
Participant 5	24	Dentistry	Female
Participant 6	20	Dentistry	Female
Participant 7	21	Dentistry	Male
Participant 8	23	Dentistry	Male
Participant 9	24	Dentistry	Female
Participant 10	25	Dentistry	Female
Participant 11	28	Dentistry	Female
Participant 12	25	Dentistry	Male
Participant 13	20	Dentistry	Male
Participant 14	21	Dentistry	Female
Participant 15	24	Dentistry	Female

The number of initial codes generated from each interview differed according to the length, depth, and experiential richness of the interview. Participants 1 to 15 contributed 31, 29, 32, 16, 22, 25, 29, 23, 33, 28, 26, 23, 34, 23, and 23 codes, respectively. The largest number of codes was obtained from Participant 13, with 34 codes, representing approximately 9% of the total dataset. The smallest number was extracted from Participant 4, with 16 codes, representing approximately 4% of the total. Overall, the interviews generated 397 initial codes.

A frequency-based examination of the interview vocabulary further indicated that words and concepts related to divorce, help, success, work, children, loneliness, support, and management were among the most frequently repeated expressions. The recurrence of these terms was consistent with the thematic results, which showed that participants' experiences involved both significant psychosocial

difficulties and active attempts to seek support, reconstruct their lives, and develop adaptive capacities.

The first research question concerned the components that should constitute a psychological and educational empowerment program for university students from divorced families. The analysis showed that participants' needs could not be represented through a single psychological dimension. Instead, the findings formed a hierarchical thematic network involving psychological, familial, social, economic, emotional, interpersonal, cognitive, developmental, and support-related dimensions.

Table 2 presents the final relationship among the five global themes, 15 organizing themes, and 79 basic themes. The table represents the final conceptual structure derived from the interviews and constitutes the principal empirical framework used to formulate the intervention package.

Table 2*Global, Organizing, and Basic Themes Extracted from the Interviews*

Global theme	Organizing theme	Basic themes
Lived experience of difficulties associated with parental divorce	Psychological and personal difficulties	High stress; self-neglect; loneliness; lack of concentration; hopelessness; aggression; depression; anxiety; perceived inability; perceived weakness
Lived experience of difficulties associated with parental divorce	Social and family difficulties	Difficulty communicating in groups; feeling misunderstood by others; blaming others; lack of support from friends; being ridiculed; living in two homes; continuing parental conflict; deterioration in the quality of family relationships
Lived experience of difficulties associated with parental divorce	Financial and economic difficulties	Lack of money; absence of financial support from the father; reduction in family income; inability to pay expenses; lack of appropriate clothing and personal or educational equipment
Psychological resilience	Emotional management	Identification of emotions associated with parental divorce, including sadness, anger, and anxiety; emotional expression; healthy emotional expression through communication with a

		counselor or trusted person; stress management; strengthening self-confidence; confronting fears; strengthening a positive self-image; coping with personal fears
Psychological resilience	Coping skills	Seeking support from friends or university counselors; relaxation; deep breathing; changing one's perspective from self-blame to acceptance; step-by-step problem-solving
Strengthening communication skills	Interpersonal relationships	Expressing needs without conflict; maintaining emotional independence from divorced parents; establishing healthy relational boundaries; networking in the university environment; identifying nonfamilial support; recognizing supportive relationships
Strengthening communication skills	Communication improvement and conflict resolution	Assertiveness; conflict management with parents, siblings, and others; friendship-building skills; conversation skills; active listening
Personal and cognitive development	Critical thinking	Identifying inaccurate attributions, including self-blame for parental divorce or academic difficulties; challenging negative thoughts; developing a realistic perspective; accepting change
Personal and cognitive development	Management of loneliness and isolation	Managing loneliness; establishing a sense of security; mindfulness techniques; self-kindness and self-compassion; group discussion
Personal and cognitive development	Planning and goal setting	Setting goals; planning for goal achievement; formulating attainable goals
Personal and cognitive development	Self-knowledge and recovery	Strengthening self-awareness; self-assessment of personal and academic strengths; recognizing personal strengths and weaknesses; discovering talents; strengthening capabilities
Personal and cognitive development	Self-care	Planning for self-care; maintaining psychological health; developing positive daily habits
Personal and cognitive development	Life skills	Time management for balancing academic and family demands; managing life changes such as relocation and financial transitions; basic financial management and budgeting; academic skills
Development of social support	Social support	Participating in support groups; strengthening social networks; identifying support resources, including psychological counseling and financial services
Development of social support	Establishment of strong support networks	Professional networking through university, support groups, or virtual environments; teamwork

The thematic structure showed that the participants' accounts included both problem-oriented and resource-oriented content. The first global theme represented the difficulties and disruptions experienced following parental divorce. The other four global themes represented psychological capacities, skills, and contextual resources that could contribute to adjustment and empowerment. Thus, the intervention package needed to acknowledge the participants' experiences of distress while simultaneously developing resilience, communication competence, personal growth, and social support.

Lived Experience of Difficulties Associated with Parental Divorce

The first global theme was the lived experience of difficulties associated with parental divorce. This theme represented a major part of the participants' emotional, psychological, interpersonal, and material reality. The findings indicated that parental divorce was not perceived merely as a change in family structure. Instead, it was experienced as a significant life event that disrupted psychological security, emotional stability, family belonging, social functioning, and economic conditions.

At the psychological and personal level, participants reported stress, anxiety, depression, hopelessness, aggression, loneliness, low concentration, self-neglect, perceived weakness, and feelings of inability. Participant 1 stated, "After my parents divorced, I was under a lot of

stress. It was as though something was always occupying my mind. I could not sleep at night, and I was worried about the future." Participant 4 similarly explained, "Anxiety was destroying me. I was always waiting for the next argument. My heart was beating fast, and I could not calm down." These statements indicated that parental divorce had become internalized as an enduring psychological crisis rather than remaining a temporary external event.

The reports of hopelessness and inability were particularly relevant to the development of the empowerment package. Some participants believed that the family crisis had destroyed their prospects for future achievement. Others reported feeling physically and emotionally depleted. One participant described feeling as though no power remained within them, while another believed that nothing they did could change their circumstances. Aggression was also described as a response to unresolved anger, chronic exposure to parental conflict, and the tendency to blame others for the family situation.

Social and familial difficulties represented another important dimension of this global theme. Continuing parental conflict, living alternately in two homes, reduced family intimacy, lack of understanding from others, inadequate friendship support, ridicule, and difficulty communicating in social groups were repeatedly reported. Participant 6 explained, "The continuous arguments between my mother and father drove me crazy. I felt as though I was

in the middle of a war.” Participant 7 stated, “Living in two homes was very difficult. Every week I had to pack my things. I felt homeless.”

Several participants described not feeling that they fully belonged to either household. The instability of moving between homes was associated with confusion, fatigue, lack of security, and the loss of a consistent personal space. Other participants stated that their friends or peers ridiculed them because their parents were divorced, which contributed to shame, diminished self-confidence, and withdrawal from social situations. A lack of understanding from others intensified loneliness because participants frequently believed that people around them minimized the effects of divorce or expected them to forget the experience quickly.

Financial and economic difficulties constituted the third organizing theme within the lived experience of problems. Participants reported reduced family income, lack of financial support from their fathers, inability to meet university and living expenses, lack of suitable clothing or educational equipment, and embarrassment when comparing themselves with financially secure peers. Some participants were required to work while studying to compensate for the reduction in family resources. Participant 5 explained, “My father did not provide financial support and left me alone. I had to work and teach to cover my expenses.” Another participant described being unable to join friends in social activities because of financial limitations.

These findings indicated that the psychological consequences of parental divorce were intensified when emotional instability was accompanied by economic insecurity. The intervention therefore needed to acknowledge that empowerment could not be limited to emotion-regulation training. It also needed to incorporate realistic problem-solving, financial management, help-seeking, and access to institutional support.

Psychological Resilience

The second global theme was psychological resilience. The participants’ experiences showed that exposure to parental divorce did not necessarily result in permanent psychological dysfunction or passivity. A number of participants gradually developed capacities that allowed them to adapt, regain equilibrium, and continue pursuing educational and personal goals. Resilience, as represented in the interviews, did not mean the absence of suffering. Rather, it referred to the ability to understand distress, respond adaptively, recover psychological functioning, and continue developing despite adverse circumstances.

Emotional management was a principal dimension of resilience. Participants emphasized the importance of identifying sadness, anger, anxiety, fear, and feelings of rejection. They also described the value of expressing emotions rather than suppressing them. Participant 8 stated, “Expressing my emotions through conversation helped me control my anger and concentrate more on my studies. It helped me release negative feelings, and now I feel stronger.” Another participant indicated that recognizing the anxiety associated with parental divorce enabled them to search for appropriate solutions.

The interviews further highlighted stress management, self-confidence, a positive self-image, and confrontation with personal fears. Participants reported that small achievable goals, daily confidence-building exercises, recognition of personal strengths, and confronting fears of failure or abandonment helped restore their sense of competence. These accounts demonstrated that emotional regulation and self-efficacy were closely connected: as participants learned to understand and manage their emotions, they became more confident in their capacity to cope with academic, interpersonal, and family challenges.

Coping skills represented the second organizing theme within psychological resilience. Participants described deep breathing, relaxation, counseling, seeking support from friends, cognitive reframing, acceptance, and step-by-step problem-solving as useful strategies. Participant 12 stated, “Deep breathing was one of the reasons I became calmer, and it helped me study. This technique reduced my anxiety.” Participant 3 explained that listening to music and using simple relaxation methods helped calm the mind.

A particularly important finding concerned the transition from self-blame to acceptance. Some participants initially believed that they were somehow responsible for their parents’ divorce or for the continuing problems within the family. Learning to identify these inaccurate attributions and adopt a more realistic interpretation reduced guilt and allowed psychological energy to be redirected toward education, relationships, and future goals. Step-by-step problem-solving similarly enabled participants to divide overwhelming family or financial problems into manageable tasks.

Strengthening Communication Skills

The third global theme was the strengthening of communication skills. The findings indicated that family disruption and prolonged exposure to conflict affected the participants’ expectations of relationships and their ability to communicate. At the same time, adaptation to these

difficulties encouraged some participants to reconsider how they established boundaries, expressed needs, sought support, and managed disagreement.

The interpersonal-relationship theme included expressing needs without aggression, maintaining emotional independence from divorced parents, establishing healthy boundaries, developing university-based networks, identifying nonfamilial support, and distinguishing supportive from harmful relationships. Maintaining emotional independence was particularly important for participants who had become excessively involved in parental disputes or had assumed responsibility for a parent's emotional well-being. Participants indicated that learning to separate their own goals and emotions from parental conflicts enabled them to focus more effectively on their lives.

Establishing healthy boundaries was also described as a means of preserving psychological energy and preventing repeated relational injury. Participant 2 reported that setting appropriate boundaries helped control relationships and contributed to success. Networking within the university environment enabled participants to establish friendships, access academic assistance, and reduce loneliness.

The second organizing theme involved communication improvement and conflict resolution. Participants identified assertiveness, active listening, conversation skills, friendship-building, and conflict management as essential competencies. Participant 3 stated, "Assertiveness helped me express my needs, and that helped me succeed." Participants also noted that learning to listen, speak without accusation, and state needs clearly reduced conflict with parents and siblings.

These findings suggested that psychological empowerment required more than internal emotional change. It also involved the acquisition of observable relational behaviors through which participants could protect their boundaries, create supportive relationships, and communicate effectively in emotionally charged situations.

Personal and Cognitive Development

The fourth global theme, personal and cognitive development, was the broadest thematic domain. It demonstrated that some participants experienced parental divorce not only as a source of harm but also as a context in which self-reflection, cognitive reconstruction, and personal growth became possible.

Critical thinking involved challenging negative thoughts, identifying inaccurate causal attributions, adopting realistic perspectives, and accepting unavoidable changes.

Participant 2 stated, "Challenging negative thoughts helped me think more positively, and that contributed to my success." Participants who stopped attributing the divorce to personal inadequacy were better able to reduce self-blame and develop hope.

The management of loneliness and isolation included mindfulness, self-compassion, a sense of security, group discussion, and active strategies for building relationships. Participants described daily routines, mindfulness exercises, and self-kindness as methods of reducing emotional instability. Group discussions were valuable because they normalized the experience of parental divorce and allowed participants to recognize that others faced similar difficulties.

Planning and goal setting provided structure and direction. Participants explained that realistic, attainable goals prevented hopelessness and created a sense of gradual progress. Goal setting was closely connected to self-efficacy because achieving smaller objectives enabled participants to revise negative beliefs about their abilities.

Self-knowledge and recovery included recognizing strengths and weaknesses, assessing personal and academic functioning, discovering talents, and reinforcing capabilities. Participants reported that greater self-awareness helped them select appropriate educational or occupational directions and make decisions that were less influenced by family conflict.

Self-care involved psychological health, daily positive habits, exercise, rest, and intentional planning for personal well-being. Several participants recognized that they had neglected themselves while focusing on parental difficulties. Reintroducing self-care practices helped them regulate energy, reduce depressive symptoms, and regain a sense of personal value.

Life skills included time management, management of life transitions, financial management, and academic skills. These skills were especially relevant because some participants were simultaneously managing academic responsibilities, employment, family tension, residential changes, and financial limitations. The inclusion of these practical components ensured that the empowerment package addressed the participants' everyday functioning rather than focusing solely on abstract psychological concepts.

Development of Social Support

The fifth global theme was the development of social support. Participants emphasized that psychological recovery could not be achieved exclusively through internal

capacities. Access to supportive people, groups, professionals, and institutional resources was a central protective factor.

The social-support theme included participation in support groups, identification of counseling or financial resources, and strengthening social networks. Participant 1 stated, "Participating in support groups helped me share my experiences and contributed to my success." Another participant explained that identifying support resources made it possible to obtain practical and emotional assistance.

The establishment of strong support networks included professional networking and teamwork. University-based networking helped participants obtain friendships, academic support, and career opportunities. Teamwork reduced isolation, strengthened social competence, and introduced participants to new perspectives. These findings indicated that a comprehensive empowerment intervention should

help participants identify, access, and maintain both formal and informal support resources.

The intervention package was developed inductively from the participants' lived experiences and then strengthened through theoretical integration. The purpose of this process was to ensure that the program was neither based solely on abstract theory nor restricted to unstructured personal accounts. Instead, the empirically derived needs were aligned with established psychological constructs, including psychological empowerment, self-efficacy, emotion regulation, self-compassion, basic psychological needs, post-divorce adjustment, and trauma-informed intervention.

Table 3 presents the principal relationship between participants' lived experiences, the extracted concepts, the supporting theoretical domains, and their practical application within the program.

Table 3

Integration of Lived Experiences, Psychological Concepts, and Intervention Applications

Theoretical domain	Lived experience identified in interviews	Extracted concept	Supporting theoretical framework	Application in the package
Psychological empowerment	Perceived lack of control over living conditions and family-related decisions	Sense of control and personal agency	Psychological empowerment framework	Decision-making, personal choice, and problem-solving exercises
Self-efficacy	Belief in being unable to manage academic, interpersonal, and family challenges	Belief in personal capability	Self-efficacy theory	Graded mastery exercises, recognition of strengths, and confidence-building activities
Emotion regulation	Suppression, uncontrolled expression, or accumulation of negative emotions	Identification, expression, and regulation of emotion	Process model of emotion regulation	Emotion identification, healthy expression, relaxation, and stress-management training
Self-compassion	Severe self-blame, shame, and self-criticism associated with parental divorce	Self-acceptance and self-kindness	Self-compassion framework	Self-compassionate dialogue, reduction of self-criticism, and compassionate writing
Basic psychological needs	Loneliness, lack of belonging, and inadequate emotional support	Need for relatedness, competence, and autonomy	Self-determination theory	Strengthening supportive relationships, autonomy, and competence
Adjustment to parental divorce	Difficulty accepting family changes, relocation, living in two homes, and altered family roles	Post-divorce adjustment	Divorce-adjustment frameworks	Acceptance, adaptation to change, realistic planning, and management of family transitions
Trauma-informed intervention	Fear of repeated conflict, abandonment, and recurrence of harmful relational patterns	Trauma awareness and psychological safety	Trauma-informed care	Establishment of a safe group environment, emotional stabilization, boundaries, and predictable session structure

The conversion of qualitative themes into intervention content involved four principal analytical operations. Initially, the interviews were openly coded and the basic themes were identified. The themes were then compared with established theoretical frameworks to ensure conceptual adequacy. Next, the validated themes were translated into behavioral and educational objectives. Finally, culturally and contextually appropriate activities

were designed according to the needs and priorities identified by the participants.

The integration of the qualitative findings and theoretical foundations resulted in a ten-session psychological and educational empowerment program. Each session included a title, behavioral objectives, educational content, in-session exercises, homework assignments, and evaluation criteria. The sessions were ordered developmentally, beginning with psychological safety and acceptance, progressing through

emotional and cognitive empowerment, and concluding with integration, relapse prevention, and future planning.

Table 4

Final Ten-Session Psychological Empowerment Program for University Students from Divorced Families

Session	Title	Behavioral objectives	Principal content and in-session activities	Homework and evaluation indicators
1	Understanding and Acceptance	Establish psychological safety; clarify group expectations; recognize the effects of parental divorce; differentiate personal responsibility from parental decisions; begin acceptance of the family reality	Introduction to the program; group rules and confidentiality; psychoeducation concerning common psychological, social, familial, and financial consequences of parental divorce; life-event timeline; identification of personal reactions; normalization of emotional responses; discussion of controllable and uncontrollable aspects of the situation	Complete a personal experience timeline; record major changes associated with parental divorce; identify three areas under personal control. Evaluation focuses on participation, ability to identify consequences, and initial differentiation between personal and parental responsibility
2	Foundations of Resilience	Understand resilience as a dynamic process; identify personal resources; recognize previous successful coping experiences; strengthen perceived capability	Definition of resilience; distinction between resilience and denial of distress; identification of internal and external resources; personal-strength mapping; discussion of previous achievements; graded mastery experiences; development of a personal resilience profile	Maintain a strengths journal; document one successful coping response each day; complete one manageable mastery task. Evaluation focuses on recognition of strengths, realistic appraisal of capabilities, and completion of the mastery task
3	Cognitive Reconstruction	Identify automatic negative thoughts and inaccurate attributions; reduce self-blame; challenge catastrophic beliefs; develop realistic and balanced interpretations	Relationship among situations, thoughts, emotions, and behavior; identification of self-blaming and hopeless thoughts; examination of evidence; cognitive restructuring; alternative-thought generation; examples involving parental conflict, academic failure, intimacy, and fear of repeating parental patterns; thought-record practice	Complete structured thought records; identify at least three inaccurate attributions; generate balanced alternative statements. Evaluation focuses on the ability to distinguish events from interpretations and produce realistic alternative thoughts
4	The Power of Communication	Express emotions and needs without aggression; develop assertiveness; practice active listening; establish healthy boundaries; reduce interpersonal misunderstanding	Communication styles; assertive versus passive and aggressive communication; use of "I" statements; active listening; expression of needs without blame; boundary setting with parents and relatives; emotional independence from parental conflict; role-playing common family and university situations	Practice one assertive conversation; record the situation, emotional response, communication strategy, and result. Evaluation focuses on clarity of expression, use of active listening, and maintenance of appropriate boundaries
5	The Art of Coping	Develop adaptive coping strategies; manage acute stress; use relaxation and deep breathing; apply step-by-step problem-solving; seek appropriate help	Distinction between adaptive and maladaptive coping; diaphragmatic breathing; progressive relaxation; stress-management planning; problem definition; generation and evaluation of alternatives; selection and implementation of solutions; appropriate help-seeking from friends, counselors, and university services	Practice breathing or relaxation daily; apply the problem-solving sequence to one current difficulty; identify two available support resources. Evaluation focuses on correct use of coping techniques and completion of the problem-solving steps
6	A Lovable Self	Strengthen self-compassion and self-respect; reduce shame and self-criticism; develop a positive self-image; improve self-care	Components of self-compassion; common humanity; mindful awareness of suffering; compassionate self-talk; compassionate-letter exercise; recognition of self-neglect; development of a personal self-care plan; positive self-image and realistic appreciation of strengths	Write a compassionate letter to oneself; implement two self-care activities; record self-critical thoughts and compassionate alternatives. Evaluation focuses on reduced self-judgment, ability to formulate compassionate responses, and adherence to the self-care plan
7	Planning the Future	Establish realistic educational, personal, relational, and occupational goals; improve time management; manage change; increase financial and academic self-management	Values clarification; short-, medium-, and long-term goals; SMART goal formulation; division of goals into attainable steps; time-management matrix; balancing academic and family responsibilities; basic budgeting; adaptation to relocation and financial changes; identification of academic skill needs	Prepare an individual future plan; create a weekly schedule and basic monthly budget; implement the first step toward one selected goal. Evaluation focuses on specificity, attainability, sequencing, and consistency of the future plan
8	A Safe Network	Identify supportive and harmful relationships; strengthen social and professional networks; reduce loneliness; increase	Mapping the current support network; recognition of emotional, informational, and professional support; identification of supportive relationships;	Contact one appropriate support resource; participate in one constructive social or group activity; revise the personal support-network map.

		access to formal and informal support	friendship-building skills; university networking; support groups; counselors, mentors, and financial or academic services; safe online networking; teamwork activity	Evaluation focuses on diversity, accessibility, and safety of identified supports
9	Integration	Integrate emotional, cognitive, interpersonal, coping, and life-management skills; apply skills to complex real-life situations; strengthen confidence in independent use	Review of previous sessions; multidimensional case scenarios involving family conflict, financial stress, academic pressure, loneliness, and relational fear; selection and combination of appropriate techniques; group problem-solving; personal change review; identification of remaining vulnerabilities	Apply an integrated coping plan to one real situation; complete a personal progress review. Evaluation focuses on the ability to select multiple relevant skills and explain why they are appropriate
10	Equipped for the Journey	Consolidate learning; anticipate future difficulties; develop relapse-prevention and maintenance plans; strengthen commitment to continued growth and support seeking	Review of personal achievements; identification of warning signs; relapse-prevention planning; emergency support plan; maintenance of self-care, communication, and resilience practices; presentation of individual empowerment plans; group closure and feedback	Finalize a written maintenance plan, support plan, and personal commitment statement. Evaluation focuses on comprehensiveness of the plan, recognition of warning signs, and readiness to use acquired skills independently

The second research question concerned whether the psychological and educational empowerment program possessed adequate content validity. The initial ten-session version was evaluated by 12 experts in clinical psychology, counseling, health psychology, family research, and psychological intervention. Experts were purposively selected based on postgraduate qualifications, at least five years of relevant professional experience, and familiarity with psychological and family-based interventions.

The experts evaluated the necessity, conceptual relevance, clarity, simplicity, educational sequence, clinical acceptability, and feasibility of the sessions. Content validity was examined using the Content Validity Ratio and the Content Validity Index. For 12 experts, a CVR value of 0.56 was used as the critical threshold. Values equal to or greater than the threshold were considered acceptable, whereas lower values indicated that revision was required. A CVI greater than 0.80 was considered acceptable.

During the first evaluation, the overall mean CVR of the package was 0.72. Most sessions were evaluated as necessary and acceptable. However, Session 3, Cognitive Reconstruction, and Session 7, Planning the Future, each obtained a CVR of 0.50, which was below the designated threshold. Their initial CVI values were also 0.78, indicating that their relevance, clarity, or practical presentation required improvement.

The experts' qualitative feedback clarified the reasons for these lower values. Some objectives were considered

excessively theoretical, particularly in Sessions 3 and 7. The relationship between several activities and psychological empowerment needed to be made more explicit. Experts also recommended strengthening the self-compassion component, simplifying the homework instructions, presenting tasks in a step-by-step format, placing communication-skills instruction before advanced problem-solving, and adding realistic examples derived from the conflicts commonly experienced by university students from divorced families.

Accordingly, the behavioral objectives of Sessions 3 and 7 were rewritten, additional experiential and operational exercises were introduced, and the relationship between each activity and the broader empowerment construct was clarified. Self-compassionate responses to self-blame were incorporated more explicitly into cognitive reconstruction. Homework instructions were simplified, examples were contextualized, and the educational sequence was revised to ensure that communication competencies preceded the application of complex problem-solving skills.

Following these revisions, the package was reevaluated. All ten sessions reached the acceptable threshold. The CVR values of Sessions 3 and 7 increased from 0.50 to 0.67. The overall mean CVR increased from 0.72 to 0.73. The overall mean CVI increased from 0.89 to 0.91, while the CVI values for Sessions 3 and 7 increased from 0.78 to 0.88 and 0.87, respectively.

Table 5

Content-Validity Results Before and After Revision of the Ten-Session Program

Session	Initial CVR	Initial status	Final CVR	Final status	Initial CVI	Final CVI
Session 1: Understanding and Acceptance	0.67	Accepted	0.67	Final approval	0.92	0.93
Session 2: Foundations of Resilience	0.83	Accepted	0.83	Final approval	0.95	0.96
Session 3: Cognitive Reconstruction	0.50	Revision required	0.67	Final approval after improvement	0.78	0.88
Session 4: The Power of Communication	0.67	Accepted	0.67	Final approval	0.90	0.91
Session 5: The Art of Coping	0.83	Accepted	0.83	Final approval	0.93	0.94
Session 6: A Lovable Self	0.67	Accepted	0.67	Final approval	0.87	0.88
Session 7: Planning the Future	0.50	Revision required	0.67	Final approval after improvement	0.78	0.87
Session 8: A Safe Network	0.83	Accepted	0.83	Final approval	0.91	0.92
Session 9: Integration	0.83	Accepted	0.83	Final approval	0.92	0.93
Session 10: Equipped for the Journey	0.83	Accepted	0.83	Final approval	0.93	0.94
Overall package mean	0.72	Acceptable, with revisions required	0.73	Final approval of the complete program	0.89	0.91

The final validation results indicated a high level of expert agreement concerning the necessity, relevance, clarity, simplicity, sequencing, and applicability of the intervention content. The improvement in the indices for Sessions 3 and 7 demonstrated that the revision process successfully addressed the experts' concerns. Consequently, the final version of the ten-session psychological empowerment program was judged to possess adequate content validity for use with university students from divorced families.

The findings showed that the lived experience of university students from divorced families was complex, multidimensional, and dynamic. It was not limited to emotional distress or family disruption but involved an interconnected network of psychological, social, familial, financial, interpersonal, academic, and developmental consequences. Parental divorce could therefore function simultaneously as a source of injury, insecurity, conflict, and pressure and as a context in which resilience, self-awareness, interpersonal learning, and personal growth might gradually develop.

The first global theme demonstrated the pervasive difficulties experienced by the participants. Stress, anxiety, depression, hopelessness, loneliness, aggression, lack of concentration, family conflict, living in two homes, ridicule, diminished social support, and financial deprivation represented interconnected aspects of the same experience. These findings indicated that interventions designed for this

population should not reduce parental divorce to a single psychological symptom or a temporary family problem.

The second global theme showed that participants could develop resilience through emotional awareness, healthy expression, stress management, self-confidence, relaxation, help-seeking, acceptance, and problem-solving. These resources enabled participants to regain psychological balance without denying the continuing presence of difficulty.

The third global theme indicated that communication reconstruction was central to empowerment. Expressing needs, establishing boundaries, maintaining emotional independence, listening actively, managing conflict, and forming supportive relationships were necessary for reducing the relational consequences of parental divorce.

The fourth global theme demonstrated that empowerment involved personal and cognitive growth. Participants described challenging negative thoughts, reducing self-blame, accepting change, practicing self-compassion, developing mindfulness, setting realistic goals, discovering personal strengths, caring for themselves, and acquiring practical life skills.

The fifth global theme emphasized that empowerment was not exclusively an intrapersonal process. Support groups, friendships, counselors, mentors, university services, professional networks, and teamwork constituted external resources that strengthened belonging, safety, adjustment, and future opportunity.

Taken together, the five global themes represented five interconnected dimensions of empowerment: recognition of injury and difficulty, restoration of psychological balance, reconstruction of relationships, development of personal and cognitive capacities, and mobilization of social support. The final intervention package was therefore designed as a multidimensional program rather than a narrowly symptom-focused treatment.

The final analytical structure comprised 397 initial codes, 79 basic themes, 15 organizing themes, and five global themes. These findings provided the empirical and conceptual basis for the ten-session program. Following two rounds of expert review and targeted revision, the final package achieved acceptable CVR and CVI values and was approved as a coherent, relevant, comprehensible, and practically applicable psychological empowerment intervention for university students from divorced families.

4. Discussion

The present study was conducted to design and validate a psychological empowerment program for university students from divorced families. The thematic analysis of the interviews yielded 397 initial codes, 79 basic themes, 15 organizing themes, and five global themes: the lived experience of difficulties associated with parental divorce, psychological resilience, strengthening communication skills, personal and cognitive development, and development of social support. These themes formed the empirical foundation of a ten-session psychological and educational intervention package. The content-validation process further showed that the revised program had acceptable expert validity, with all sessions exceeding the required Content Validity Ratio threshold after revision and the overall Content Validity Index increasing from 0.89 to 0.91. These findings indicate that the psychological empowerment needs of university students from divorced families are multidimensional and that an intervention designed for this population should simultaneously address distress, emotional regulation, interpersonal functioning, personal agency, practical life skills, and access to supportive relationships.

The first global theme, the lived experience of difficulties associated with parental divorce, included psychological and personal, social and familial, and financial and economic problems. Participants described stress, anxiety, depression, hopelessness, loneliness, aggression, lack of concentration, self-neglect, perceived weakness, and diminished

confidence in their abilities. These results suggest that the consequences of parental divorce may persist into university years and affect emotional stability, academic functioning, self-perception, and everyday decision-making. This finding is consistent with research showing that children of divorce may display greater psychological difficulties than peers from intact families, including internalizing and externalizing symptoms (Moradi & Akhane, 2020). It also corresponds with qualitative evidence indicating that the psychological effects of parental divorce can continue into adulthood through insecurity, emotional distress, unresolved anger, mistrust, and difficulties in developing a coherent understanding of the experience (Khandandel et al., 2023).

The persistence of distress can be explained by the fact that parental divorce is not necessarily a single, time-limited event. For many individuals, it represents a continuing developmental context involving changes in residence, family roles, parental availability, economic conditions, and interpersonal expectations. The participants' reports of living in two homes, feeling caught between parents, and remaining exposed to parental conflict indicate that the psychological burden often arises from the prolonged reorganization of family life rather than the legal act of divorce alone. The importance of family emotional relationships is supported by evidence showing that emotional intimacy is closely associated with the adjustment of children living in divorced single-parent families (Guttmann & Rosenberg, 2003). When emotional availability and family intimacy decline, children may experience diminished security and may struggle to maintain confidence in close relationships.

The participants also described social stigma, ridicule, inadequate friendship support, and feeling misunderstood by others. These experiences may intensify the psychological consequences of divorce by adding shame and social exclusion to the original family disruption. Being labeled negatively as a child of divorce may become incorporated into self-concept, particularly when peers or relatives treat the individual as damaged, deprived, or fundamentally different. The qualitative findings of the present study suggest that social reactions are not peripheral influences but can become major determinants of adjustment. This interpretation is consistent with evidence that psychological processes moderate how children of divorce evaluate their quality of life (Sorek, 2019). The meaning attributed to divorce and the perceived availability of understanding and support can either intensify or reduce its negative consequences.

Continuing parental conflict and exposure to alienating relational processes may further explain participants' interpersonal insecurity. Some students reported blaming one or both parents, fearing repeated relational failure, or struggling to trust others. A systematic review of parental alienation exposure found that children of divorced parents may experience enduring emotional consequences that extend into later relationships and psychological functioning (Miralles et al., 2023). Even in the absence of formal parental alienation, repeated messages that one parent is dangerous, irresponsible, or unworthy may create loyalty conflicts and identity disturbance because children often experience themselves as psychologically connected to both parents. Such experiences may help explain why the package developed in this study included cognitive reconstruction, emotional independence, healthy boundaries, communication skills, and conflict management.

The results further revealed that the consequences of divorce were shaped by later family transitions, including changes in parental relationships and the possibility of remarriage. Concerns related to belonging, replacement, emotional loyalty, and uncertainty regarding new family roles can prolong the adjustment process. The lived experiences of children confronting the possibility of their mothers' remarriage similarly demonstrate that post-divorce family reconstruction involves complex emotional and cultural meanings (Hatami Varzaneh & Imani, 2025). Thus, empowerment requires helping students distinguish between parental choices and their own identity, establish flexible boundaries, and develop the capacity to adapt to changes without interpreting them as evidence of personal rejection.

Financial and economic problems were another major component of the participants' lived experience. Reduced family income, absence of financial support from fathers, inability to meet university expenses, and embarrassment regarding clothing or educational resources were repeatedly described. These pressures may affect psychological health through several pathways. Financial insecurity increases chronic stress, restricts social participation, may require students to work while studying, and can weaken academic performance. It can also intensify feelings of abandonment when economic deprivation is interpreted as parental neglect. The emergence of financial management, time management, academic skills, and identification of institutional resources within the intervention package reflects the practical nature of psychological empowerment. The findings indicate that emotional support alone may be

insufficient when students are simultaneously coping with material instability.

The second global theme was psychological resilience, consisting of emotional management and coping skills. Participants described recognizing and expressing emotions, managing stress, strengthening self-confidence, confronting fears, using relaxation and deep breathing, seeking counseling, changing self-blaming interpretations, and solving problems gradually. These findings show that adaptation after parental divorce involves active psychological processes rather than passive endurance. Resilience in this context appears to involve the capacity to acknowledge distress, regulate emotional reactions, draw on personal and interpersonal resources, and continue pursuing meaningful goals.

The identification of resilience is consistent with findings that specialized programs for children of divorce can improve self-concept and resilience (Hosseini Yazdi et al., 2015). A stronger self-concept may enable individuals to understand that their parents' marital failure does not define their personal worth or future relational capacity. The participants' emphasis on confidence, strengths, and confronting fears supports this interpretation. When students develop mastery experiences and recognize areas of competence, they may replace helplessness with a greater sense of personal agency.

Healthy emotional expression was another important element of resilience. Participants explained that suppressing anger, sadness, or anxiety worsened their condition, whereas talking with counselors, writing, and communicating emotions reduced pressure. Previous studies have similarly shown that integrated psychoeducational intervention can improve emotional expressiveness and reduce psychological difficulties among children of divorced parents (Soleimani et al., 2022). Cognitive-behavioral and unified transdiagnostic interventions have also been found to influence emotional expression and fear of intimacy in this population (Soleymani et al., 2020). These findings support the inclusion of emotion identification, healthy expression, stress reduction, and transdiagnostic coping strategies in the developed package.

Self-compassion and self-kindness were also embedded in the resilience and personal-development themes. Participants frequently described self-blame, shame, and the belief that they were somehow responsible for family problems. Compassion-focused therapy has been shown to improve self-esteem and functional flexibility among children of divorce (Gorjinpor et al., 2020). Self-compassion

may reduce the tendency to treat emotional pain as evidence of weakness and instead encourage a balanced recognition that suffering is understandable and manageable. The inclusion of compassionate self-talk, reduction of self-criticism, and self-care in the intervention was therefore consistent with both the participants' needs and earlier intervention findings.

The third global theme, strengthening communication skills, included interpersonal relationships, assertiveness, active listening, healthy boundaries, friendship-building, networking, and conflict resolution. These findings indicate that relational empowerment is central to post-divorce adjustment. Students who grow up in high-conflict families may have limited opportunities to observe constructive disagreement, emotional validation, or stable boundary setting. Consequently, they may reproduce avoidance, aggression, excessive accommodation, or emotional dependence in their own relationships.

The importance of emotional intimacy and relational quality in the adjustment of children of divorce has previously been demonstrated (Guttmann & Rosenberg, 2003). In the present study, participants emphasized that learning to communicate needs without conflict, maintain emotional independence from parents, and identify supportive relationships helped them regain control. These skills may reduce the likelihood that students become triangulated into parental conflicts or assume responsibility for regulating a parent's emotions. They also support the formation of healthier friendships and intimate relationships during emerging adulthood.

The need for structured communication training is additionally supported by studies of specialized divorce interventions. The Children of Divorce Intervention Program has been shown to reduce internalized and externalized problems (Hoseini Yazdi et al., 2015; Hoseini Yazdi et al., 2021). Such programs typically combine emotional support, correction of misconceptions, problem-solving, and interpersonal-skills training. The present findings extend this logic to university students by emphasizing adult developmental concerns such as emotional autonomy, boundaries, networking, and fear of intimacy. Furthermore, parent-focused intervention research has shown that improving mothers' behavior and interactions with children can produce beneficial outcomes (Gholami et al., 2019). However, because university students may not be able to secure parental participation, strengthening their own communication skills represents a practical and developmentally appropriate approach.

The fourth and broadest global theme was personal and cognitive development. This theme included critical thinking, management of loneliness, goal setting, self-knowledge, self-care, and life skills. Participants described identifying inaccurate beliefs, challenging negative thoughts, accepting changes, practicing mindfulness and self-kindness, discovering talents, setting achievable goals, and managing academic, financial, and personal responsibilities. These findings show that psychological empowerment extends beyond symptom reduction and includes the reconstruction of identity and future orientation.

The cognitive components align with evidence that interventions can modify children's perceptions of parental divorce (Ramazanzadeh et al., 2023). Self-blaming and catastrophic interpretations may maintain distress even when immediate family conflict has decreased. Cognitive reconstruction enables students to separate facts from interpretations, recognize that they did not cause the divorce, and challenge the assumption that their own relationships must follow the same pattern. This process may also increase hope, which has been identified as an important psychological characteristic among students from divorced or single-parent families (Eslami et al., 2017). Goal setting and pathway thinking can help students regain direction and perceive themselves as capable of shaping their future.

The personal-development theme is also consistent with positive psychology research. Positive psychology-based intervention has been found to reduce internalized problems in children of divorce (Vahedi et al., 2021). Strength-based activities may broaden the individual's identity beyond family adversity and increase awareness of competence, values, gratitude, and future possibilities. Similarly, acceptance and commitment group therapy has been shown to enhance psychological well-being and happiness among children of divorce (Zolghadri et al., 2024). Acceptance, mindfulness, values clarification, and committed action are especially relevant when students are struggling with family realities that cannot be reversed. These approaches allow the individual to acknowledge painful experiences while investing in educational, relational, and personal goals.

The fifth global theme was the development of social support. Participants emphasized support groups, counselors, friends, university services, professional networks, teamwork, and identification of nonfamilial resources. This finding highlights that psychological empowerment is not purely an internal process. Personal resilience may be difficult to sustain in the absence of responsive relationships and accessible institutional support.

Social support can provide emotional validation, practical assistance, information, opportunities, and a sense of belonging.

The moderating role of psychological and relational processes in the quality of life of children of divorce supports this interpretation (Sorek, 2019). When students are able to share their experiences with understanding peers or professionals, loneliness may decrease and the divorce may become less stigmatizing. Group-based interventions may be particularly valuable because they normalize experiences and provide opportunities to practice communication skills. The effectiveness of structured intervention programs for internalizing, externalizing, emotional, and relational problems also suggests that organized support can facilitate adjustment (Hoseini Yazdi et al., 2015; Soleimani et al., 2022).

The final ten-session package integrated the five global themes into a sequential structure involving acceptance, resilience, cognitive reconstruction, communication, coping, self-compassion, future planning, support-network development, integration, and maintenance. The expert-validation findings supported this structure. Although the initial version was generally acceptable, the cognitive-reconstruction and future-planning sessions required revision. This may have occurred because theoretically important content is not necessarily perceived as useful unless objectives, exercises, and applications are clearly operationalized. After practical activities, contextual examples, self-compassion components, and clearer homework instructions were added, both sessions met the required validity threshold.

The increase in the overall CVI from 0.89 to 0.91 and the final approval of all sessions indicate that the package achieved adequate clarity, relevance, simplicity, and applicability. The expert feedback also confirmed the value of integrating qualitative findings with established theoretical and intervention approaches. Rather than relying on a single model, the package combined elements supported by research on resilience, self-concept, compassion, positive psychology, acceptance, emotional expression, cognitive restructuring, and divorce-specific intervention (Gorjinpor et al., 2020; Hosseini Yazdi et al., 2015; Vahedi et al., 2021; Zolghadri et al., 2024). This integrative structure appears appropriate because the participants' difficulties were themselves multidimensional.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the results suggest that university students from divorced families should not be understood exclusively through a deficit-oriented perspective. Although they may experience substantial psychological, relational, and economic adversity, they also possess capacities for resilience, growth, communication, self-knowledge, and social connection. The designed program reflects this dual reality by recognizing suffering while developing agency and competence. Its qualitative grounding increases contextual relevance, while its theoretical integration and expert validation strengthen conceptual coherence. Consequently, the package may provide a suitable foundation for subsequent feasibility studies and effectiveness trials with university populations.

6. Limitations & Suggestions

The study had several limitations. Participants were selected purposively from a relatively small and homogeneous group of dentistry students, which may restrict the transferability of the findings to students in other academic disciplines, educational settings, socioeconomic groups, or cultural contexts. The results were based primarily on retrospective self-reports, and participants' current emotional conditions may have influenced how they remembered and interpreted earlier family experiences. Although thematic saturation was achieved, some less common experiences may not have been represented. The expert panel also consisted of a limited number of specialists, and content validity does not by itself establish the feasibility, acceptability, clinical effectiveness, or long-term effects of the package. Moreover, the intervention was designed for university students and may not be directly appropriate for children, adolescents, nonstudent emerging adults, or individuals experiencing acute psychiatric crises.

Future research should examine the package with more diverse samples drawn from different universities, academic fields, regions, socioeconomic backgrounds, and family structures. Feasibility and pilot studies should assess recruitment, attendance, participant satisfaction, treatment adherence, homework completion, and the suitability of session length and delivery format. Controlled intervention studies should evaluate the effects of the program on psychological empowerment, self-compassion, intimacy, resilience, emotion regulation, loneliness, academic functioning, and quality of life. Long-term follow-up assessments are needed to determine whether improvements

are maintained. Researchers should also compare individual, face-to-face group, online, and blended formats and investigate whether outcomes differ according to gender, age at parental divorce, time since divorce, parental conflict, residential arrangements, remarriage, and financial strain.

University counseling centers should screen sensitively for unresolved difficulties associated with parental divorce and avoid treating these students as a uniform or inherently impaired population. Counselors may use the package as a structured group-based program while adapting examples and exercises to participants' developmental, cultural, and financial circumstances. Particular attention should be given to emotional regulation, reduction of self-blame, healthy boundaries with parents, communication skills, realistic goal setting, self-care, and access to support. Universities should also strengthen referral pathways linking students with psychological counseling, academic assistance, financial services, peer-support groups, career guidance, and emergency resources. Facilitators implementing the package should be trained to create a confidential, trauma-sensitive, and nonjudgmental environment in which students can discuss family experiences without pressure to disclose more than they consider safe.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.

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